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20 YEARS!
1987-2007
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Mercenaries

This fall, the Mercenaries are back in action in an all-new videogame, *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames*. At the same time, these well-armed soldiers of fortune are storming the comic shop racks—and they're aided in the process by a videogame-to-comics veteran.

No one can accuse the writer of Dynamite's *Mercenaries* comic of being unfamiliar with the game, since the writer of the comic and the writer of the new videogame are the same person: **Brian Reed**, writer of *Ms. Marvel* and co-writer of *New Avengers: Illuminati* and *Red Sonja*. "I was hired last fall to write the cinematics and mission briefings for the video game *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames*," Reed said. "Then, a couple months back, as my work on that project was wrapping up, Dynamite made the deal with Pandemic Studios to do a comic based on the game property. Since I'd just written the game, and was familiar with the characters, and I had just started working on *Red Sonja* with **Mike Oeming**, **Nick Barrucci** of Dynamite asked if I'd be interested in writing the comic."

Moving back and forth between videogames and comics is almost second nature for Reed. "For ten years, I labored away in the video game mines, bringing only the shiniest hunks of gameplay to the surface world. Near the end of my

loose and blow up whole Army bases entirely because you know it's expected of you."

There are things that Reed can do in the comic that he couldn't do with the videogame. "It is certainly nice to have some meat on the bone to begin with, but there's still a lot of narrative work in a comic that isn't there in a game. Most games don't have the time/budget to do a deep story with a lot of character development, or quiet moments. But in a comic, you can get into those things.

"For the *Mercenaries* series, I'm able to explore some of the back history of the Mercs—especially Jennifer's family, who are all caught up in the middle of the China/Taiwan conflict. It's a fun story to explore, and it's great fodder for a comic/novel/film, but it's not something you really care about when you're hammering on the 'A' button, trying to get to the next part of the game level so you can blow up more stuff.

"Ultimately, though, a story is a story is a story and it still has to be structured properly and the characters still have to resonate as human beings if they're video game soldiers for hire, or super heroes saving the world."

How "real-world" is the game? Did Reed build any current events into the *Mercenaries* story line to add to the real-

ity, or does it operate in its own fictional world?

"*Mercenaries* plays in that same nebulous corner of geopolitics as the *Tom Clancy* books. If you squint just a bit, you can see how these things might come to be, and we like to give them a grounding in potential real-world events (the first game was in North Korea, the second in Venezuela, the comic is following up on a decades old debate between China and Taiwan), but the *Mercenaries* license is, at its heart, a big budget crazy-ass action movie with a rock and roll soundtrack."

Did Reed create any new characters specifically for the comic? "As I mentioned earlier, our main characters are the same as the game. You've got Chris, an American who is an absolute pragmatist and always ready to do whatever will get everyone through the day alive. Then there's Jennifer, a half Chinese/half-British woman who is entirely in this line of work for the money and has never made an employment decision based on morals in her life—she will do a job for you and then two minutes later do a job for your worst enemy. Mattias is a crazy Swede biker who loves nothing more than a good brawl, or an explosion. Oh, and he's maybe not entirely sane. Finally, there's Fiona, the team's controller. She's the voice on the radio, situated back at HQ,

Mercenaries Got Game—and Comics, Too!

time in the game mines, I was in charge of a little project called *Ultimate Spider-Man*, working as both lead game designer and writer. When the chance came to work with **Brian Bendis**, I happily gave up my writer position since the guy who created the series was now a part of the project. All I did was hand him what I'd been outlining because we knew we wanted to give the player a chance to play as Spider-Man and Venom both, and we needed to have a story that reflected that.

"Somehow, this process turned into me co-writing the game story/dialog/etc with Bendis. The game led to my chance to pitch stories to Marvel for their *Spider-Man Unlimited* book, and one of my pitches got picked up there—vol 2, issue 11, kids!—and the rest is history." Since then, Reed and Bendis have collaborated on *Spider-Woman: Origins* and the aforementioned *New Avengers: Illuminati*; he has collaborated with **Mike Oeming** on *Red Sonja*; and Reed has soloed on *Ms. Marvel*... and now, on *Mercenaries*.

What's the story of the comic, and how does it relate to the videogame? "We open in Taiwan in the near future, when China has decided it's time to bring the longtime rogue nation state back into the fold. The *Mercenaries* (Chris, Jennifer and Mattias—the same three main characters as the video game series) are in-country, working a job for the Taiwanese Resistance when their controller Fiona—the person who handles all of their intel, and oversees their missions ala Oracle from *Birds of Prey*—is kidnapped."

Is the comic a prequel, a sequel, or a parallel tie-in to the game? "I pretty intentionally left things foggy insofar as where or when this adventure fits in the timeline of the franchise," Reed said. "That way fans of the game can enjoy it, but people new to the characters and the settings aren't confused by getting hit with too much continuity."

Was it difficult to make the *Mercenaries* transition from videogames to comics? "It was actually pretty easy. When I took the job writing the game I was told 'think **Jerry Bruckheimer**'—and as long as I'm gunning for that kind of crazy over-the-top insanity, I know I'm in *Mercenaries* territory. It's fun to just let



feeding the team information and helping them survive their current mission."

Should the miniseries prove to be as successful as Dynamite anticipates, would Reed like to revisit the characters and concepts in another comic book series? "Oh, yeah!" Reed replied.

"They're a fun group of characters. I'd like to do a road comic with Mattias going out in the world to find himself -- and kicking the ass of everyone he met along the way. I think that story could have an explosions-per-page ratio heretofore unheard of in war comics."

Readers who aren't familiar with the videogame don't have to worry about feeling lost in the comic book series.

"Every comic I write, even if it's an issue in the middle of a story arc, I write it as if it is someone's first comic, or at least their first comic in this series," Reed explained. "I always make sure there's enough information on the page to get you into the story and understand what is going on no matter where we are in the series or license history. It's always important to grab as many people as possible and hold onto them—and I find that I'm more likely to come back next issue if I understood what the hell was going on this issue!"

Mercenaries #1, a \$3.99 comic by **Brian Reed** and **Edgar Salazar**, is scheduled for November release. The book is offered with two different interconnecting pieces of cover art by **Michael Turner**; in addition, Dynamite will offer a limited foil cover edition and a signed edition autographed by the cover artist.

by **Cliff Biggers**

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!



CSNsider

- Variant collectors, scramble for action: Marvel has an ultra-limited 1 in 100 white variant cover edition of *Ultimate Spider-Man* #112 in the works, and it should be in stores next week!
- And speaking of variant covers: the announced J. Scott Campbell variant cover for *Stephen King's Dark Tower: Gunslinger Born* #7 is now replaced by an Olivier Coipel variant cover.
- Change of contents for *Catwoman* #71: the issue will no longer tie in to *Amazons Attack*. Instead, it will feature a Will Pfeifer-David Lopez-Alvaro Lopez story in which Selina Kyle has to say goodbye to the most important person in her life.. and the loss will make Catwoman harder and more dangerous than ever before.
- Apparently Kulan Gath isn't quite as tough an adversary as previously thought: it's only going to take Spidey & Red Sonja four issues to finish him off! As a result, the Dynamite-Marvel *Spider-Man/Red Sonja* miniseries has been trimmed from five issues to four.
- Don't fear—you haven't missed the first

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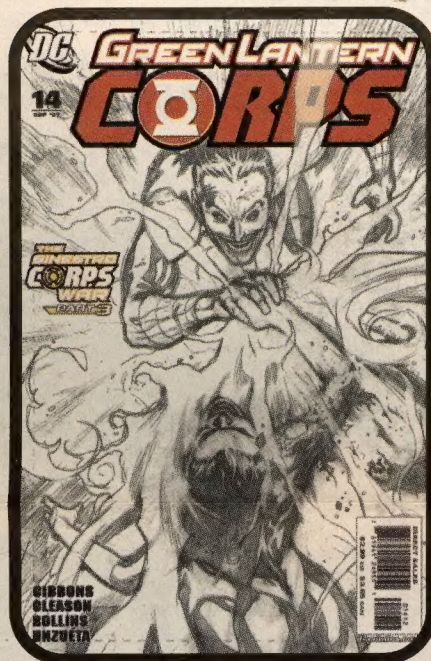
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Comic Shop Newsarama

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issue of Marvel's new *Halo: Uprising* series. The book has been pushed back from its July release date to next week... so add it to your 8/15/07 shopping list right now!

- More *Endangered Species* sellouts: *Uncanny X-Men* #488, (featuring the second chapter of the serialized tale) *X-Factor* #21 (featuring the third chapter), and *New X-Men* #40 (fourth chapter) have all sold out within days of release. No news of a second printing for any of 'em as of press-time.



• *Green Lantern Corps* #14 marks the third consecutive sellout for "Sinestro Corps War" installments—but this one set its own record by becoming the first installment to sell out prior to release! To ensure that readers don't miss any part of the story, DC is rushing a second printing into comic shops; it should be on the shelves this week, in fact (it's the book with the pencils-only version of the cover art by Patrick Gleason).

• New publisher A First Salvo makes its presence known later this year with the release of *Danger's Dozen* #1, an adventure series by Thad Branco, Anthony Cannonier, & Norm Breyfogle. The story presents the paranormal adventures of a team comprised of a former RAF pilot and his eleven-member crew of former military men and women from various nations. Look for the first issue in December.

• It's rare for a Todd McFarlane-related sculpture to appear from anyone other than TMP, but that's just what's happening this fall when Diamond Select and

Dynamic Forces present their *Todd McFarlane's Hulk Statue*, a thousand-piece limited edition based on McFarlane's version of the gray Hulk as presented during his pre-Image run on the title.

• Diamond Select and Gentle Giant unveil their fowl scheme: this October sees the release of their *Howard the Duck Statue*, limited to 1500 pieces.

• Amaze Ink goes all out for their October-release *Haunted Mansion Volume One Limited Edition Hardcover*, a slipcased volume designed to look like an antique collectible, complete with imitation leather binding, gold foil stamping, deckled edges, and a slipcase; inside, the book includes the first six issues of Amaze Ink's Disney-inspired series.

• Garth Ennis revisits Wormwood in October in the 48-page full-color oneshot *Chronicles of Wormwood: The Last Enemy*, illustrated by Rob Steen. It should be in stores at about the same time as the trade paperback edition of Ennis & Jacen Burrows' *Chronicles of Wormwood TP*, reprinting the original series (and for those who prefer their collected editions a bit more upscale, there'll be a 750-copy hardcover version of the collected edition).

• Frank Miller & Simon Bisley's *Bad Boy* gets the deluxe hardcover treatment from Dynamite just in time for its tenth anniversary. Bisley provides an all-new cover and additional interior art for this edition.

• Dynamite continues its deluxe reprinting of Jim Starlin's *Dreadstar* with *Dreadstar Volume Two*, a limited Starlin-signed hardcover collecting *Metamorphosis Odyssey*, *The Price*, and *Dreadstar: The Graphic Novel*, all originally released between 1980 and 1982.

• The Battlestar Pegasus and its Commander, Cain, are the focus of *New Battlestar Galactica: Pegasus*, a one-shot by Brandon Jerwa & Jonathan Lau.

• *Of Scenes & Stories*, the Desperado Publishing collection of short tales written by Gary Reed, has been postponed; when the book is rescheduled, you'll hear about it in CSNsider.

• CrossGen's short-lived pirate series *El Cazador*, produced by Chuck Dixon & Steve Epting, is collected by Checker Publishing in trade paperback in October; all six issues will be included.

• Julie Doucet may have moved away from comics, but she hasn't forgotten her

past entirely: Drawn & Quarterly's *365 Days—A Diary* by Julie Doucet blends personal narrative, collage, and drawing to tell readers what Doucet has been

doing lately as she expands her artistic horizons.

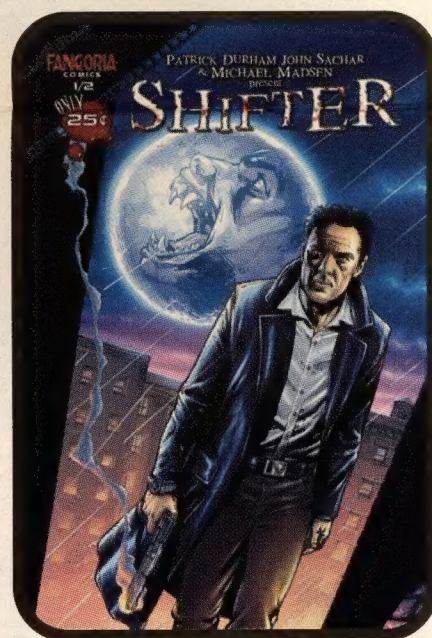
• Jack Cole's all-too-short-lived syndicated newspaper strip *Betsy & Me*, which was produced for only 2 1/2 months before Cole took his life, is collected in its entirety by Fantagraphics this fall. The trade paperback complements the strip with a biographical sketch by R.C. Harvey.

• Charlie Huston gets a co-writer beginning with November's *Moon Knight* #14 as Mike Benson, a television writer/producer who has worked on *The Bernie Mac Show*, *Just Shoot Me*, and *Entourage*, joins the team. He'll work with Huston for the next few months before moving into a *Moon Knight* solo writer role next year.

• Monte Beauchamp is *Blab*-bing again in October with the release of *Blab Volume 18*, featuring material by Marc Zingarelli, Peter Kuper, Sue Coe, Skip Williamson, and others.

• Enjoy E.C. Segar's creative output from 1930 to 1932 in *Popeye Volume Two: Well, Blow Me Down*, a hardcover compilation of *Thimble Theater* that includes, among other things, the first appearance of Wimpy.

• Gemstone's *EC Archives* line adds a new title in October: *Vault of Horror Volume One* features 24 macabre short tales by Al Feldstein, Johnny Craig, Wally Wood, Harry Harrison, Harvey Kurtzman, Graham Ingels, Jack Davis, and others, all presented in the same sophisticated color as readers have



enjoyed in the prior *EC Archives* volumes.

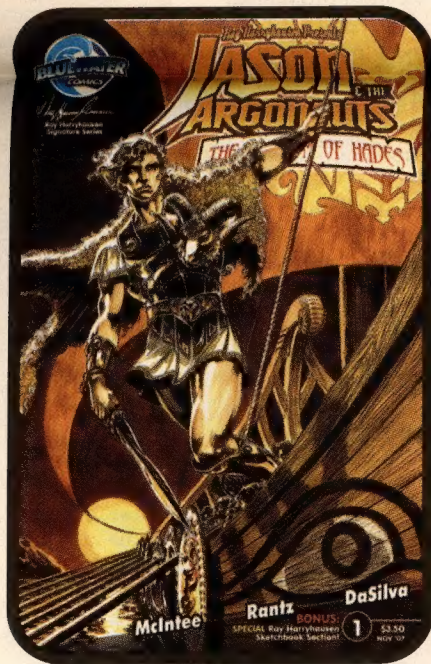
• Fangoria Comics will kick off its new series *Shifter* with a 25¢ 1/2 issue. The series, which is co-created by Patrick Durham, John Sachar, and Michael Madsen, features the likeness of Madsen in the lead role of this tale of a mob hitman who's capable of looking like almost any beast or man. The series is written by Mark Kidwell with art by Stephen Thompson. Look for the 1/2 issue in November, with the four-part miniseries to kick off a month later.

• Can comic book artists make a deadline? They can when they're working for collector and fan Michael Finn, who has for the past several years challenged artists to produce a sketch in three minutes. This

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fall, The Hero Initiative (a great charity that helps out veteran comics creators who have no pensions or insurance) will offer readers a look at those sketches in a 112-page volume that includes work by Neal Adams, Howard Chaykin, Steve McNiven, George Pérez, John Romita Sr. & Jr., Walter Simonson, & Michael Turner, among others.

- **Supernatural: Origins #1**, the television-series-inspired WildStorm comic that tells the saga of John Winchester's transformation into a full-fledged Hunter, has sold out. DC has no plans to go back to press
- Just as they did with this summer's *Transformers* film, IDW is offering their adaptation of Neil Gaiman, Roger Avery, & Robert Zemeckis' *Beowulf* in two formats: a weekly comic book series and an all-in-one trade paperback compilation.
- And speaking of *Transformers*... October sees the release of IDW's ultimate *Transformers* collectors' volume, *The Transformers Premiere Edition Volume One*, which collects *Infiltration*, *Stormbringer*, *Escalation*, and oodles of standalone *Spotlight* issues in a single massive 500+ page hardcover.
- Maybe they should call it *90 Days of Night*... This October, IDW collects the original *30 Days of Night* trilogy by Steve Niles & Ben Templesmith (*30 Days of Night*, *Dark Days*, and *Return to Barrow*) in one massive hardcover, complete with a numbered tip-in-plate hand-signed by both creators.



- Bluewater Productions adds another Ray Harryhausen title to its lineup in November with the debut of *Ray Harryhausen Presents Jason & the Argonauts: Kingdom of Hades*, produced by David McIntee & Rantz, with cover art by comics great Mike Grell. The story picks up after Jason and his men have recovered the Golden Fleece... but now they have to find their way back home!
- Just in time for the 75th anniversary of the film that started it all, Markosia revisits the Kong legend with *Kong: King of Skull Island*, based on the prequel/sequel by Joe DeVito. What happened after Kong's fall? What was done with the

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body? What happened to Carl Denham? What is the history of Skull Island? Readers begin to get the answers in October's zero issue.

- Both volumes of Marjane Satrapi's first-person look at life in Iran during the Islamic Revolution are collected in Pantheon Books' *The Complete Persepolis*, an October-release trade paperback.
- It's a graphic novel. It's a rock and roll tell-all! It's two... two... *two* books in one! Riverhead Publishing's *Gorillaz: Rise of the Ogre* reveals the complete story of this ground-breaking band in an irreverent, light-hearted 304-page graphic novel.
- TokyoPop revisits the world of Jim Henson's *Dark Crystal* this fall in Barbara Randall Kesel & Max Kim's *Legends of the Dark Crystal Volume One: The Garthim Wars*, an original prequel set a century before the events of the film.
- If you don't give a hoot, you haven't yet discovered the charms of this series of wordless graphic novels! Andy Runton's *Owly* returns in *Owly Volume Four: Don't Be Afraid*, rescheduled from early 2007 release... and worth the wait!
- Top Shelf publisher Chris Staros presents events from his own high school life in *Yearbook Stories: 1976-1978*, featuring stories illustrated by Bo Hampton & Rich Tommaso.
- The work of ace illustrator and storyteller Frank Cho is spotlighted in *Modern Masters Volume 14: Frank Cho*, which features an insightful interview and scads of art, much of which has never been seen before now.
- Bryan Talbot & Mark Stafford's *Desperado* series *Cherubs* is being taken off the monthly schedule; instead, publisher Joe Pruett intends to resolicit the book as a graphic novel later this year. "The book looks great," Pruett said about the dark fantasy-comedy, "and I think it's going to have a much bigger impact if readers can enjoy the whole story in one volume."

Wow! WildStorm Engages in Warcraft

DC has confirmed a project that's been rumored for several months: through their WildStorm imprint, they will offer a *World of Warcraft* comic based on Blizzard Entertainment's popular massively multi-player online role-playing game.

The ongoing monthly series will be written by industry veteran Walter Simonson and will feature art by Ludo Lullabi & Sandra Hope. The first six issues of the *World of Warcraft* comic series will each feature two covers, one by superstar comic book artist Jim Lee and a second by Blizzard Entertainment senior art director Samwise Didier.

The first storyline of the new ongoing series begins when a human is found unconscious on the shores of Kalimdor, with no memory of who he is or how he arrived there. Enslaved by an orc shaman, the man must fight for survival against members of both the Alliance and the Horde. He strikes uneasy relationships with other races in his quest to find the



secrets of his past.

Rumors that DC would produce the comic began when DC Unlimited announced that they had the rights to produce action figures based on the *World of Warcraft* franchise. DC has obviously been working on the project for several months to prepare for the fall 2007 launch.

Nicieza & Sparacio Ready for Action

A couple of weeks ago, CSN told you about Moonstone's upcoming *Captain Action* comic book (inspired by the 1960's-era articulated action figure who could don the costumes of various licensed heroes) and its writer, Fabian Nicieza. Now we can give you more info on the series—including the artist, who was found through an art submission competition publicized (among other places) here in these pages!

Moonstone has tapped Mark Sparacio to provide the visuals for the new series. "To say the least, I am very excited to be part of the new *Captain Action* comic book team," Sparacio said. "As a huge fan of the Ideal Toys action figure and, of course, the first *Captain Action* comic book that legendary comic creators Jim Shooter, Wally Wood and Gil Kane worked on, I was thrilled when I received the news that I was chosen to be the interior penciller and cover painter for the new Moonstone comic book series..."

"When I was told that Fabian Nicieza would be writing the book, I was blown away. After reading Fabian's script for part one and the terrific back story that he has created for *Captain Action*, I was totally hooked."

"We at Captain Action Enterprises are thrilled at the addition of Mark Sparacio to this book," Joe Ahern of Captain Action Enterprises said. "His unique style of painted art is certain to bring Fabian's script to a whole new level!"

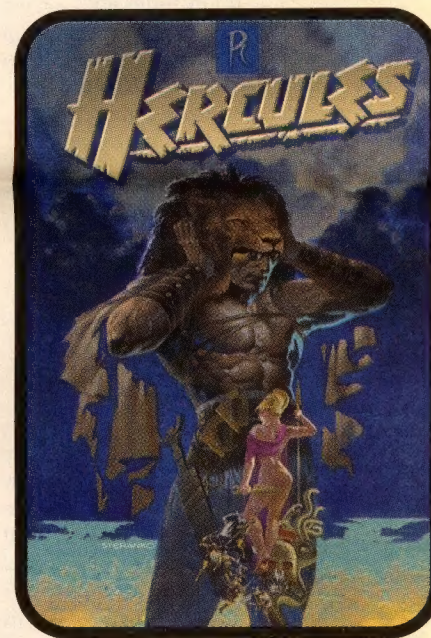
Moonstone will offer a sneak peek of their upcoming *Captain Action* series that will appear as a two-part "second feature" in the back of the company's upcoming *Buckaroo Banzai* limited series. "We are

proud to bring *Captain Action* back to comics," Moonstone Editor in Chief Joe Gentile said. "We think comic fans are going to be really surprised by the very slick direction Fabian has taken with the character. This should appeal to both fans of the classic action figure, as well as fans of cool spy/hero adventure."

Levine & Elliott's Radical Departure

You might think that Blatant Pictures president Barry Levine had enough on his plate already, what with his company's upcoming Johnny Depp-starring film *Rex Mundi*, based on the comic by Aroid Nelson & Eric J. Turns out that Levine is getting into comics in an even bigger way: he and Atomeka's Dave Elliott (best known for the critically acclaimed *A1*) plan to launch their own company, Radical Publishing, early next year.

Levine may not be well known to comics fans, but he has a history within the field. "I worked with Mike Richardson at Dark Horse Entertainment for nearly four years where I helped set up *Rex Mundi* with Johnny Depp, *Criminal Macabre*, *Damn Nation*, *RIPD*, *The Nightmarist*, and was instrumental in helping set up Dark Horse Indie Films."



What motivated Levine to venture into the competitive comics market? "In any business there is the element of risk," Levine told *Comic Shop News* sarama's Matt Brady. "Film companies, recording companies go through the same start up problems as comic companies do. Businesses will always rise and fall no matter what the industry. I think the primary area in which a company will succeed or fail comes down to taste."

When it comes to taste, Levin has confidence in his and Elliott's skill at finding quality material and quality creators. "Both Dave and I are artists. I was the world's leading rock photographer for years. You learn to appreciate color and composition. As years go by people's tastes change and so do yours. I've always kept up on music and art trends, it's my job but I really enjoy it. The success of our

CALIBER



company is going to survive or fail on the choices of projects and the talent we decide to work with... We are contracting a lot of the world's top talent—sure, it is expensive, but it also defines the quality we are looking for."

The creative line-up includes an impressive array of respected talents. "When you work with artists like Yoshitaka Amano, Jim Steranko, John Bolton, or Bill Sienkiewicz, you have a good idea what you are going to get," Levine said. "I've always believed that 50% of what you are selling is not only the high concept, but how you visually interpret that concept. It would be like hiring a great director then hire a totally inadequate cinematographer."

"That being said, we are looking for new talent and we're looking all over the world for it," Elliott added. "We're particularly looking for full color painted artwork, that's using both traditional brush work and digitally rendered art."

The company is looking at comics as one aspect of a larger publishing plan. "Radical Publishing has three imprints, Radical Comics, Radical Books and Radical Art," Dave Elliott said. "Radical Comics is for the mini-series and one shots, Radical Books is for the collections

and graphic novels, and Radical Art is our art books.

Radical doesn't plan to flood the comic shop racks with a plethora of titles. "Don't look for us to have something out every month," Elliott said. "We're not market share watchers. We want to have artwork ready when it is ready and not rush anything just because we don't have a title scheduled for September."

How does the company envision itself competing with established major players like Marvel, DC, Image, and Dark Horse? "It's not about competing," Levine replied. "It is the selection of projects, the talent, the approach, genres, all of these combine to show our taste. Taste is what ultimately makes or breaks a publishing company."

MEDIEVAL



"Our approach to comics is the same as a company takes to a film," Elliott said. "We develop the story, look to find the right writer, the right artist, get some production designs done..."

Levine is quick to correct any misconception that Radical exists as a concept source for possible film project. "While our sister company, Blatant Pictures, is there for us to make films out of some of these projects, 50% of their projects aren't comic related at all," Levine said.

"We don't start out to create a movie," Elliott explained. "We create a high con-

cept, a cool story, and if our taste is right, and we've pulled together the right team, the idea should be able to stand up in other markets, in other media. We help create concepts that work in multiple markets, but ultimately they have to work as comics and graphic novels. Our desire is to create a library of books that people will still be reading in ten years from now."

When can readers expect to see the first Radical releases? "We'll be debuting our first two titles early in 2008," Levine said. "These should be *Hercules* and *Legends*. For *Hercules* we'll be displaying a Weta piece by Greg Broadmore and Jim Steranko's cover for issue one. For *Legends* we will have a piece by its creator Nick Percival as well as a piece by Patrick Tatopolis of his vision from the film version he will be directing next year.

"We'll follow these up with *Medieval* and *Caliber*. *Medieval* is The Wild Bunch in the 11th century. The comic is based on the script Peter Fedorenko and has been adapted by Ian Edginton with art by Clint Langley. *Caliber* is the brainchild of Sam Sarkar, who is writing the series, with covers by Luis Royo and Dave Wilkins. It is an Arthurian western."

Why *Hercules*, who has had more than his share of comic book "screen time" over the years? "You wouldn't ask if you read Steve Moore's scripts," Levine said. "We wanted to do a completely fresh and different take of the demi-god. There are no bronzed Adonis here in white togas and sandals. Steve has taken actual historical characters and blended them seamlessly into with the myths. It is a tough, very brutal story about someone ill at ease with his past and not thinking that he has a future worth looking forward to."

One genre that readers won't see in Radical's line of offerings: superheroes. "Superheroes are covered so well by Marvel and DC," Levine said, "the only way we would do a superhero book is if it was something like *Hellboy*. The market we are appealing to is one that is interested in crime, action, comedy, sci-fi, horror..."

In addition to top creative talent, Radical will enlist the aid of top design talent as well, including Weta. "Weta worked out great for *Hercules*. We found the right company for the right project.

We're also working with other companies like Massive Black. The idea is to visualize the project from the very beginning and gets everyone on the same page as soon as possible."

Look for more info on Radical's offerings in upcoming issues of CSN.

... With Powers and Abilities Far Beyond Those of Ordinary Men...

What do Alex Ross & Jim Krueger do now that they've wrapped up *Justice*, the best *All-Star* book DC has published thus far (even though it didn't carry the *All-Star* title or branding)?

Rather than focusing on Marvel characters (as they did in their *Universe X* saga) or DC characters (as they did in *Justice*), Krueger and Ross are turning their attention to a number of public-domain Golden Age characters in their new series, *SuperPowers*, which debuts later this year from Dynamite Comics.

The books offers a new look at classic heroes like The Black Terror, the Green Lama, the original Daredevil (now known as 'Devil'), Pyroman, the Owl, and several other characters who have fallen into the public domain when their copyrights were not renewed. For readers unfamiliar with these heroes from bygone years, Alex Ross offered a few words about some of the most prominent.

"The Black Terror... is, despite appearances, not simply a skull-emblazoned kill-em-all type character," Ross said. "He is, in fact, a sort of, 'pirate superman,' a black-clad Captain America or Superman—a variation on those themes. He is *not* simply, by motivation or behavior, the Batman archetype."

"The Green Lama holds the classic appearance of knowledge embodied in a super hero, whether by magical or religious means, and as a lama hews to a religious base, an eastern philosophy serves as both the drive and the empowerment of this character. He also fills in all the various mystical roles of characters like your Dr. Stranges, Dr. Fates, Spectres, etc.

"In the case of the 'Devil,' he embodies, frankly one of the coolest, slickest 'looks' in comics history and one of the most dra-

GREEN LAMA



THE CRUSADERS



THE DEATH-DEFYING 'DEVIL'



SAMSON



THE "F" TROOP



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DYNAMITE

matic reasons to create such a series as *SuperPowers* is to get a character like this back into the thick of publishing. His return to comics is important to me, as one of the most dominant pieces of graphic design—something I think ultimately is the forebear of so many modern costume designs. In particular, probably the most attractive costumes in comics, Spider-Man's, holds some historical allegiance to the forerunning of The Devil."

"Now, somebody like Samson is a character I have always thought of as being your primal kind of Thor-Superman-Hercules archetype... I have always imagined doing something with a character archetype fitting that role, so, picking up this guy from the 40's and doing the type of things we are doing with him now is great for me. He is literally blinded, like the biblical Samson, and holds some of that weight in his appearance; in fact on the cloak he wears is the letter—which if you read Hebrew which is read backwards—it's the first letter in the Hebrew name for Samson.

"The Crusaders are based upon the American Crusader—another great Superman/Captain America type character from the 40's, who could do all those fantastic things, flight, superpower, etc. In our modern interpretation of how time has gone on in the series, there is a certain amount of reproduction of both the bodies and the abilities of some of these classic superpowers that are put in play for our government and army as an elite force, almost like an stealth squadron of supermen. These men are called Crusaders, based upon that old 40's hero.

"The F-Troop are taken from the 1940's long-running *Frankenstein* comic, and we've applied to him the more serious interpretation. We're showing super heroes historically and how they would have a presence in our modern world, and his particular appearance, evoking the fact that he's himself been a replicated, if not imitated, work based upon the original doctor's design; so it must be something used for sort of a quick and dirty army where the bodies of dead soldiers are recycled for an additional, later purpose."

Look for more info about *SuperPowers* and its historic cast of characters in an upcoming issue of *Comic Shop News*, paving the way for the December release of the premiere issue of the series.

Archaia Looks to the Future

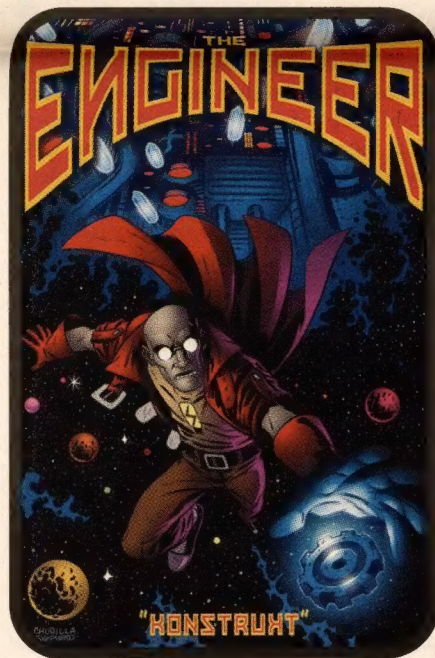
2007 is just a little more than halfway over, but Archaia Studios Press is already working ahead on next year's offerings! "I'm thrilled to help bring more diversity to the comics' playing field, both in creators and content," Archaia editor Joe Illidge said. "Our newest creators are journalists, screenwriters, and novelists. They're veterans and new players. These new titles fit perfectly in line with the vision and brand of ASP."

Archaia's five offerings for late 2007 *Comic Shop News*



and early 2008 include:

• **The Engineer** (written by Brian Churilla & Jeremy Shepherd, illustrated by Brian Churilla; a four-issue series debuting in November 2007): "An ancient sentient entity is feasting on the very fabric of space and time. Only one man can stop it: The Engineer. Utilizing a colossal pipe organ that enables pan-dimensional travel, The Engineer pursues the lost components of The Konstrukt, an archaic mechanism that imbues whoever possesses it with the ability to manipulate reality itself. The Engineer endeavors to restore The Konstrukt, using it to defeat the creature and undo the incalculable damage already done."



• **The Many Adventures of Miranda Mercury** (written by Brandon Peterson and illustrated by Lee Ferguson; debuts in February 2008): "She's the greatest adventurer in this, or any other galaxy, the kind of old-fashioned, classic science-fiction heroine that can successfully defeat The Time Raiders of Xaxium, brave the wonders of The Glass Planet, survive The Perils of Yor, and battle The Infinity Class to a veritable standstill! All while facing the one enemy that perhaps even she cannot defeat, a microscopic poison rushing through her veins, courtesy of her greatest adversary, Cyrus Vega. With only one year

left to live, Miranda Mercury will have her morality tested and values shaken to see her life's mission completed."

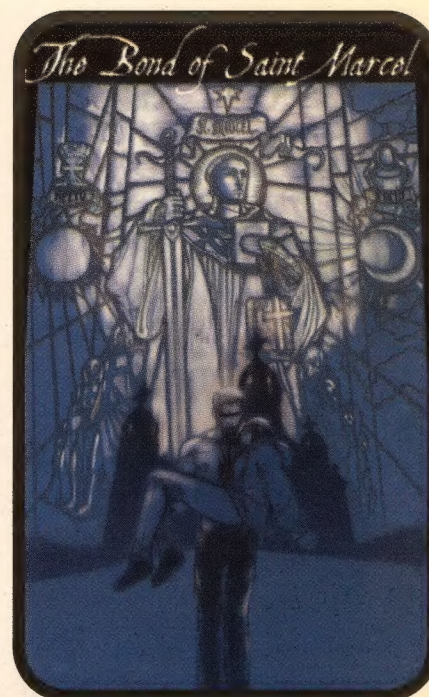
• **Cursed Pirate Girl** (written and illustrated by Jeremy Bastian; a six-issue series debuting in March 2008): "*Cursed Pirate Girl* is an epic fairy tale of a cursed girl in search of her father. The only things she knows about her father is that she will find him on the Omerta Seas, and that he is a pirate captain. The fantastic waters of the Omertas hold many

strange and dangerous creatures and forgotten evils; enlisting the help of two armored swordfish and a parrot with a secret agenda, *Cursed Pirate Girl* sets out on the perilous journey to find her father among the remaining pirate captains. But instead of a glorious reunion, the scheming of interlopers leads her to resurrect her father's most dangerous foe."

• **The Bonds of Saint Marcel** (written by Jennifer Quintenz with covers and layouts by Christian Gossett; a six issue limited series beginning in spring 2008):

"Catherine Johnstone is the black sheep in an old Boston family whose wealth and influence stretches back to the American Revolution. When Cat's family is murdered, she discovers that the only one who can save her life is Eamann, a vampire that was bonded into her family's service against its will 200 years ago. Running for her life, Cat forms an unlikely friendship with Eamann. But as she uncovers more about her family's past, they discover the killers are only hunting Cat in order to set Eamann free."

• **The Sisterhood** (written by Christopher Golden & Tom Sniegowski with art by Wellington Alves; a three-issue miniseries beginning in spring 2008): "When heavily-armed commandos massacre a convent of nuns from the Order of the Holy



Sepulchre, the very worldly Eden Parish is dispatched by her superiors to investigate what's happened to her Sisters and why. She uncovers a dangerous and indeed demonic conspiracy, a threat from within the Order aimed at its very foundation, its very purpose, and she will be tested to the limits of her endurance and resolve to defeat it."

Shifting to Cimmeria

Conan comes to an end early next year. Before you start to mourn for the passing of Dark Horse's series based on Robert E. Howard's most famous creation, though, there's a bright side: *Conan the Cimmerian #1*, the debut issue of an all-new series by Tim Truman & Tomas Giorello, with covers by Cary Nord, follows just three months later.

Conan editor Scott Allie explained the reasons for the change. "It came out of a meeting between Editorial and Marketing when we were trying to explain to them all the changes the book was going through—i.e., new writer, new artist, new editor, new chapter in Conan's career," Allie told *Comic Shop News*'s Matt Brady. "We were explaining all that, and Dirk Wood was the first one to throw out the idea of starting the series from #1. We all immediately loved it. It's largely because this is a new chapter in the character's life, but probably it has more to do with the change in creative team. I want Tim and Tomas to feel like this is their book. And I think this gives them ample opportunity to get that across."

The new series sees Conan's return to Cimmeria after the wanderings and adventures that have marked his first fifty issues. Why the return? Is it to reconnect to his roots, or for refuge of a sort? "Well, 'Cimmeria' is the first chapter of the next series. Conan returns to Cimmeria because, for all his successes, civilization really wasn't that great for him. He made one friend in all that time, and he—Nestor—died at the beginning of 'Rogues in the House.'"

"Conan doesn't really agree with civilization—a massive understatement—and things get bad enough for him between 'Rogues in the House' and 'Hand of Nergal' that he's ready to call it quits. His grandfather, who was a major inspiration to him, had also headed down into civilization, had some adventures, then headed home. In returning home, abandoning civilization, Conan considers his grandfather's own decision, and comes to understand the difference between the two of them."

Allie offered a brief synopsis of the initial storyline. "Conan returns home, and meets a stranger who knows who he is, and tells him a story about his grandfather—a story about his grandfather that he'd known before, but now he hears a different side of it. Over the course of the seven issues, he encounters more people in the hills of Cimmeria, as he heads to and arrives at his own village. He gets into plenty of trouble, on his own, but in the meantime he learns things about his grandfather that he hadn't really considered before. This, mixed with the trouble he gets into in Cimmeria, with, of course, a woman, ultimately leads to his decision to go back into the world and continue his adventures."

Does this mean that Dark Horse intends to follow the various stages of Conan's life in several targeted series? "Yeah, that's exactly it. Now Conan's beginning his career as a mercenary. He has other careers along the way, ultimately leading to his time as king of Aquilonia, when we'll probably launch a new number one and call it *Conan the King*."

How will *Conan the Cimmerian* differ

from the current *Conan*? "The big thing is that we won't have to do many fill ins. With a somewhat quicker artist, we can focus on one story, and not break it up with a lot of guest artists. Although *Richard Corben* is drawing the grandfather sequences in 'Cimmeria'—but that's a planned narrative thing, to set off past from present, rather than dropping in another artist to fix a schedule. Other than that, the main difference is that Conan's no longer a young thief, but a slightly more worldly mercenary."

What led Dark Horse to tap *Tomas Giorello* to replace current artist *Cary Nord* (who will continue to supply the cover images for the series)? "He's got a great sense of anatomy, nice storytelling, and he can do action real well. He's done some *Star Wars* stuff for us, but apparently he was dying to do Conan. His style is similar to Cary's while being more detailed, which will please some of the Cary detractors. He's quickly gotten a handle on Cary's version of the character—so it won't suddenly seem like a different guy in the main role. We want the characterization to have a lot of continuity."

Conan followed the chronology of the original *Robert E. Howard* stories pretty closely. Will this series do the same, or will it be a bit more free with Howard's hero? "The first arc, is based on a poem Howard wrote about Cimmeria, and a letter he wrote to a fan stating that shortly after 'Rogues in the House,' Conan would have returned home for the first time, something he would continue to do over the years. But after this first 'Cimmeria' arc, we're back to directly adapting

Howard stories and fragments."

Writer *Tim Truman* will play an integral role in the relaunch.

"'Cimmeria', the first seven issues of the new story, is very much Tim's creation. But 'Hand of Nergal,' the final arc of the current numbering, is largely his invention, too, because all we have from Howard is a couple pages of a fragment, no actual story. Sometimes that's been the job, as with *Mignola* and 'The Hall of the Dead.' And with the first arc of the series, 'The Frost Giant's Daughter,' only issue #2 was an adaptation of the Howard story; the rest was stuff *Kurt Busiek* made up. So every arc has room for the writer's invention—some just more so than others."

Conan #50 is scheduled for February 2008 release; *Conan the Cimmerian #1* follows in May.



Billy Tucci Livens Up the Zombie Genre

Zombies... everywhere you look, there are zombies. Sometimes it seems like the walking dead are outnumbering the living on the comic shelves!

So *Billy Tucci* is working on a zombie comic...

But this isn't just a standard zombie comic. This is a fast-paced, lively, action-packed, light-hearted zombie comic. The name is *Zombie-Sama*, it's written by Tucci, and it's illustrated by *John Broglia*.

Tucci summarized the concept of the book. "Twenty-something slacker *Jim Okami*'s day couldn't go any worse. The *Sushi shop*'s delivery boy lost a tip due to a flat bicycle tire, got dumped by his girlfriend for a rich, blonde-surfer-butthole and get this... the entire world is now being eaten alive by biologically infected zombies."

"As all hell breaks loose around him, *Jim* witnesses the great *sushi master Sanjiro*, heroically overtaken while defending the strip mall. And like *Arthur* pulling *Excalibur* from the stone, *Jim* instinctively grabs a katana honorably stationed above the restaurant's cash register and—delivery boy *Jim Okami* is reborn as *Zombie-Sama*!

"Outfitted with *Sanjiro*'s beloved cash register katana and chain mail armored 'shark suit' lifted from a local scuba shop, 'Yo *Jimbo*!' will set out on a quest to save one small town from the monstrous multitudes of flesh eating freaks..."

Where'd the concept for *Zombie-Sama* come from? "Zombie-sama is really part of my lifestyle," Tucci said. "I mean, I really live it, and as long as I can imagine I've asked everyone I know two questions when I first walk into their homes: Where do you put your Christmas tree, and is this place zombie-proof?..."

"So for me it was only natural to take this long running zombie-epic swirling around in my head since high school to print. *Jim Okami*'s character developed out of my love of samurai films and from my being a student of the Way of the

Warrior and its teachings of duty, honor and sacrifice. I'd be lying though if I didn't also mention *Shaun of the Dead* being an influence as well."

Do comics readers really need another zombie comic? "We always need another good zombie story," Tucci said, "like we do a good superhero, romance or any other type of story. As long as it's entertaining, the world will accept another zombie opus..."

"Though I see *Zombie-Sama* as a black-comedy which will offer a lot of laughs, we're also using the zombie infestation and its consequences to show the way for a very lost young man. *Jim Okami* will find his path along the way of the warrior and be guided and inspired by some very brave (and very real) people."

What does *John Broglia* bring to the project artistically that led Tucci to tap him as illustrator rather than handling the art personally? "I just love John's style—and since he's an animator, he really adds a freshness and feel to *Zombie-Sama* that makes it stand out from every other zombie book I've seen... John's in his twenties, his art has a very idealistic look that is very personal and akin to our hero, *Jim Okami*. It really helped this forty-year-old lighten up the dialogue and see things as a young man would."

Don't count on *Jim Okami*'s adventures to end with this oneshot. "We're already working on a sequel series, *Zombie-Sama 2 – Dorm of the Dead!* It's really all John's idea, and though I'll be dialoguing it with him it all spurred from his vision. The story's incredibly clever and entertaining."

Zombie-Sama is scheduled for late September release from *Crusade Comics*.

Painful or Terminal?

During her comic book career, *Painkiller Jane* has crossed paths with the likes of *Hellboy*, the *Darkness*, and *Darkchylde*, among others—but her next meeting spans time and space as *Jane* crosses paths with the *Terminator* in a four-part story written by *Painkiller Jane* co-creator *Jimmy Palmiotti* that involves both *Dynamite Comics* series.

How'd the crossover story arc come about? According to *Palmiotti*, the idea was "Dynamite's all the way... when *Nick Barrucci* [Dynamite's publisher] pitched this, I was wondering how the hell I was going to make this work and still respect everything I love about the *Terminator* property," *Palmiotti* told *Comic Shop Newsarama's* *Matt Brady*. "Took a bit, but I came up with a pitch that I hit them with and they took it to the owners of the property and they approved it. Sometimes you get lucky first shot...not often though, especially with a licensed character."

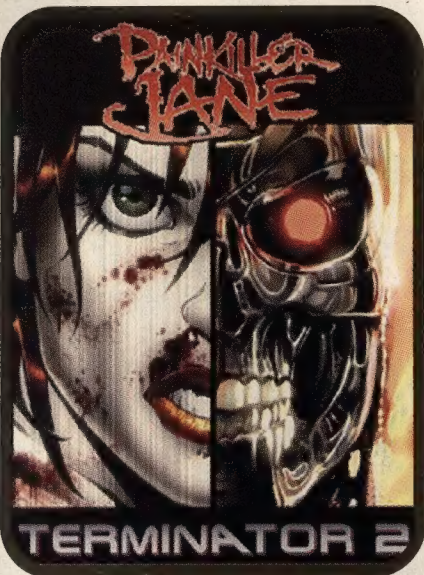
The story will appear in *Painkiller Jane* #s 4 & 5 and *Terminator* #s 6 & 7. Why a four-part crossover rather than a separate miniseries? "We thought it would be a better idea to just work the story so that it can span both titles," *Palmiotti* explained. "From my end, it's like writing a *Painkiller Jane* story with the *Terminator* as the bad guy...and in this case, the



Terminator featured is a total bad ass...
 "The idea I pitched incorporates events from the film, but turns the camera around to something else that is going on and shows something we haven't seen before as well. I think it's a cool concept that Jane and Terminator fans are going to appreciate. And no, I am *not* going to mess with the mythology of the Terminator films one bit...it's my job to build on them."

How well does the world of *Terminator 2* mesh with *Painkiller Jane*? While she's had encounters with some pretty fantastic folks, a robot from the future is kind of 'out there,' even for her... "Yeah, but isn't that cool? You go about your business and *blam!* A killing machine from the future is sent back in time and ends up in your neck of the woods. The fantastic thing about writing these characters is that are both pretty tough customers and we are going to totally explore each and every possibility out there with their interaction."
 "At the same time, we will be creating a totally new character out of this and, with a ton of respect to both properties, try to pull it all together so it would fit perfectly into the *T2* mythos. Trust me, the concept is a cool one, and one a fan of each property will want to check out."

How much of the Terminator world will Palmiotti be free to utilize? "As much of it that I like that would make sense to Jane and the world she lives in. remember, Jane's world is *not* a world of superheroes flying around saving the day. Closest thing she has to that is Ash...who has been staying quiet of late. It's the real world set up in the movies and *New York* is the battle ground we are setting up for this crossover."

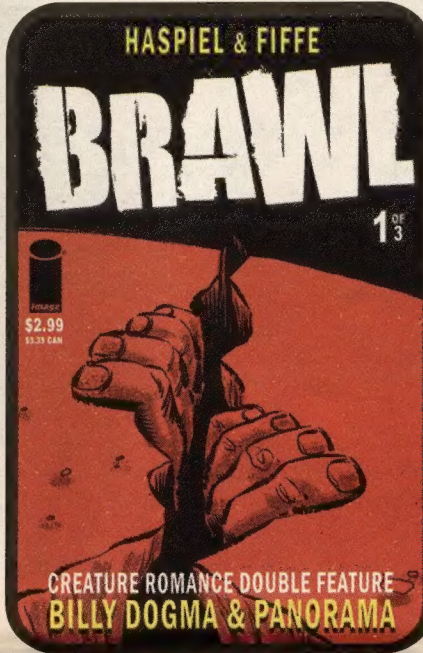


"The story opens with the Resistance making a stand on one of the Skynet strongholds, and takes place the same day as the launch of the original Terminator featured in the first film. That day, there was more than one Terminator sent back, but because of the aggression of the resistance led by John Conner and his group, something went wrong with the launch of the second Terminator...a female model of the same make...and its time frame and location got scrambled in its jump. This story follows the *other* Terminator and her

mission to kill Sara Conner as well—but from the wrong drop point, which happens to be across the country on the East Coast."

Will any installments of the story be presented from the Terminator's point of view? "There's *no* rooting for the Terminator in this story. It's a killing machine all the way, and Jane's gifts of healing her wounds may help keep her alive...but *barely*. She is a trained killer as well, but at a total disadvantage fighting something she never imagined existed."

Look for the crossover to begin in November.



Coming Comics—Image in October

Dean Haspiel & Michel Fiffe bring together their creations Billy Dogma and Panorama in *Brawl*, a three-part limited series featuring two tales—on a serialized romance, the other a psychedelic super-powered nightmare.

Looking for something a little more *disturbing* than the recently-relaunched *Tales from the Crypt*? Look now further than *Crawl Space*, a new ongoing anthology terror series. *Crawl Space: Xxombies* #1 features new tales by Rick Remender, Kieron Dwyer, & Tony Moore.

When the undertaker (and former lawyer) at Arizona's Gila Flats Territorial Prison accidentally releases 117 dead killers from Hell, he sets out track them down in *Graveslinger*, a four-issue limited series by Shannon Eric Denton, Jeff Mariotte, & John Cobins.

Run off the road and left for dead, James Lazarus sets out to find out who's responsible... and why... in the three-part *Lazarus* by Juan E. Ferreyra with Diego Cortes.

FBI Agent Ginger Brown gets a promotion in *Alex Grecian & Riley Rossmo's Proof*... and the next thing you know, she's in charge of tracking down the world's most mysterious creatures. Hey, Mulder... the proof is in here!

Top Cow continues its *Pilot Season* offerings of "testing the waters" first issues with *The Angelus* #1 by Ian

Edginton & Stjepan Sejic, which spins out of *First Born*; and *The Necromancer* by Joshua Ortega & Jonboy Meyers, which explores Abby van Alstine's past and her connection to the Dark Age demon Mali.



Ride rides again with *The Ride Halloween Special*, a one-shot by Tomm Coker that focuses on a kidnapped young woman who must outsmart the predator who has imprisoned her.

Joshua & Jonathan Luna, the brothers responsible for *Ultra* and *Girls*, have another series ready to go. *The Sword* focuses on college student Dara Brightson, whose life seems typically mundane until the day that three strangers knocked on her door looking for a unique sword...

C.B. Cebulski presents another collection of autobiographical misadventures in *Wonderlost Book Two*, featuring art by Mike Oeming, Skottie Young, and others. This second issue spotlights C.B.'s attempt to "round the bases" and attain certain "goals" he set for himself growing up.

Image collected editions include:
 • *Accelerate*, collecting the four-issue series by Richard Kadrey & the Pander Brothers;

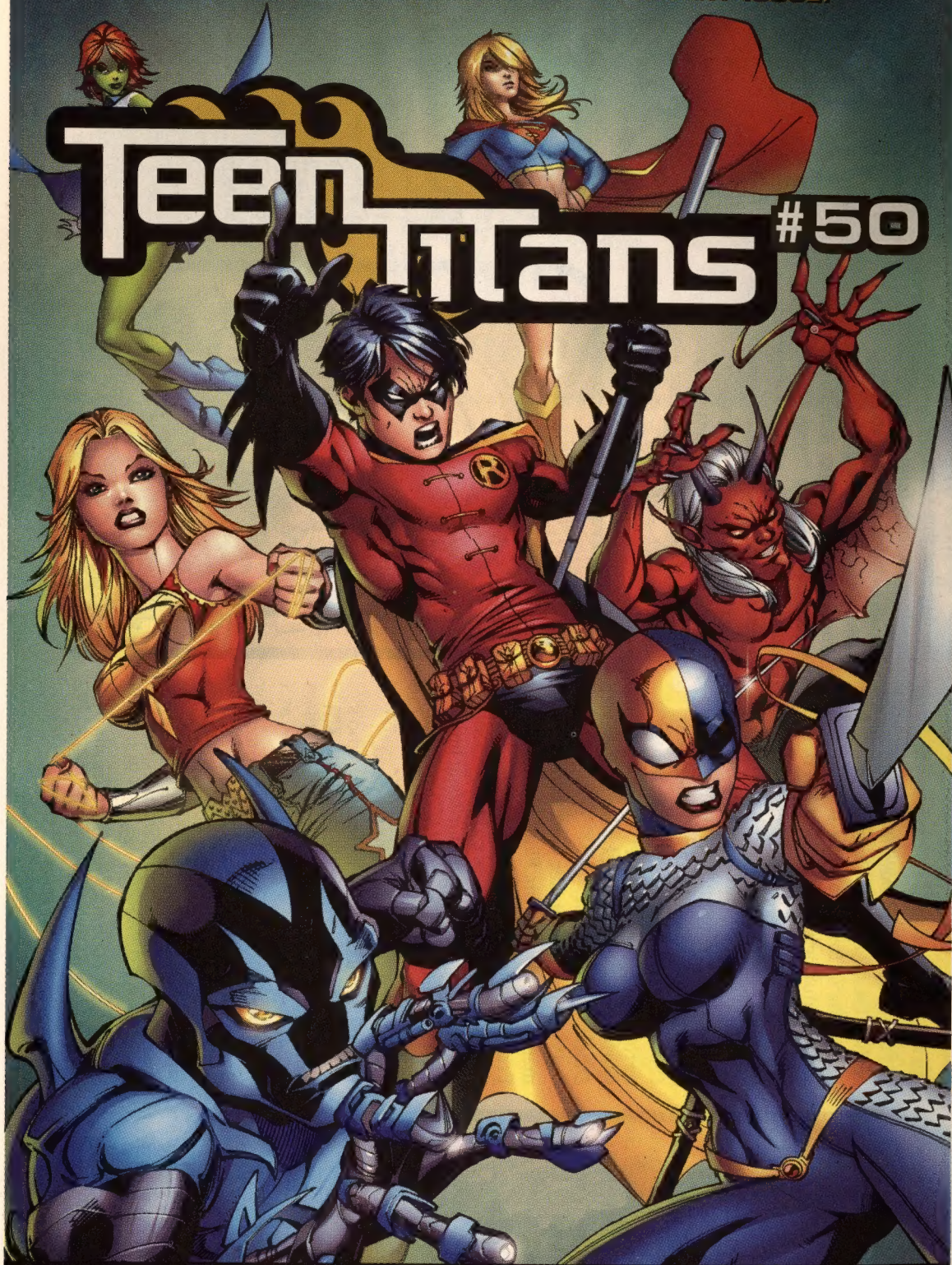


- *Dynamo 5 Volume One: Post-Nuclear Family*, collecting *Dynamo 5* #s 1-7;
- *Madman Volume Two*, collecting *Madman Comics* #s 1-11;
- *The Official Handbook of the Invincible Universe*, collecting the two-part who's who series;
- *Spawn: Armageddon Complete Collection*, a trade paperback compiling *Spawn* #s 150-163;
- *Spawn: New Flesh*, collecting *Spawn* #s



- 166-169 and the *Spawn* tale from the *Image Holiday Special*;
- *Unique*, collecting the three-issue series by Dean Motter;
- *Witchblade Compendium Volume Two*, collecting *Witchblade* #s 51-100 in one massive 1200+ page trade paperback;
- *Witchblade Compendium Volume One Limited Edition HC*, a hardcover edition collecting *Witchblade* #s 1-50, along with bonus features; and
- *Youngblood Volume One*, a hardcover collection of Rob Liefeld's remastered, rescripted, re-imagined (complete with a new ending by Rob Liefeld & Joe Casey) collection of the first five issues of *Youngblood*, paving the way for a series relaunch in 2008.

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